

Christ Episcopal Church
(Foothills Congregational Church)
461 Orange Avenue
Los Altos
Santa Clara County
California

HABS No. CA-2013

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CA-2013

CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
(Foothills Congregational Church)

Location: 461 Orange Avenue, Los Altos, Santa Clara County,
California.

USGS Cupertino Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 10.578300.4136605.

Present Owner: Foothills Congregational Church.

Present Use: Religious services and church offices.

Significance: Christ Episcopal Church is a small-scaled, one-and-a-half story building, constructed with a heavy redwood timber frame and covered with white stucco. Designed in 1914 by British-born and trained California architect Ernest Coxhead, the church exhibits Coxhead's personal interest in details of the English manor house, seen in his use of Neo-Elizabethan and Tudor window dressings, trefoil tracery, the high vaulted chamber and long, narrow gallery. The original church was enlarged in 1926, 1951 and 1973, creating a quadrangle complex, unified by a courtyard at center. Expanding beyond the building's capacity, the Episcopalian congregation moved to a larger structure in 1962.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1914. The church was dedicated on April 14, 1914 by the Rt. Rev. William Nichols, Bishop of California.
2. Architect: Ernest Coxhead (1863-1933).

Ernest Coxhead was born in England in 1863, the son of an Anglican priest. He received his architectural training as an apprentice to the English architect George A. Wallis, and later Frederick C. Chancellor. In the early 1880s, Coxhead was enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy of Art, and also attended classes at the Royal Institute of British Architects. He was elected a member of the RIBA in 1884-85 when he won its silver medal for Drawing.

Leaving Britain to start his career in the United States, he came first to Los Angeles in 1886, designing a few suburban churches there. After four years, he moved his office to San Francisco, where he set up an independent practice, then a partnership with his brother Almeric. The brothers shared an office until Almeric's death in 1928.

Coxhead was a leading figure in the development of the Bay Area Tradition, a mode of design which began to be recognized as a style in the 1940s, and which had its roots in California's late 19th century San Francisco regional architecture, as exemplified by the work of Coxhead, Bernard Maybeck, Willis Polk, A. Page Brown, A.C. Schweinfurth and Julia Morgan. The architects borrowed details from historical forms, juxtaposing them in peculiar ways, sometimes using these elements in open contradiction rather than union. They liked complex and often miniaturized spaces. David Gebhard writes in his introduction to the book Bay Area Houses (1976), "The ordinary day-to-day builder's vernacular is purposely played off against highly sophisticated spatial arrangements, surfaces, and details of design, and against a learned understanding of past historic architectural history. Interior spaces which are open and flowing at one moment, became closed and boxy at the next; and plans which appear logical, simple, and direct turn out to be highly complex. . . ." (p. 9)

The small-scaled wooden structures project an anti-urban domestic image, picturesque in their sensitively landscaped settings. Coxhead's personal interest in the English manor house is exhibited in the Episcopal Church, with his use of Neo-Elizabethan and Tudor window dressings, high vaulted chambers and the long, narrow gallery.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The structure stands upon property which is within the original plat of Los Altos, Block 25, Lots 1 and 2. The following references to the chain of title are located in The Office of the Recorder, Santa Clara County Courthouse, Santa Clara.

1914 Deed, February 18, 1914. The Los Altos Company sold the property to the Protestant Episcopal Bishop.

1962 Deed, June 25, 1962, Deed, number 2214928W. The Protestant Episcopal Bishop sold the property to the Foothills Congregational Church.
4. Original plans and construction: The original drawings and aerial perspective were published in The Architect and Engineer of California, February 1915, showing the church building as constructed, and Coxhead's proposals for subsequent additions. These additions were

completed in 1926. They generally conformed to Coxhead's overall scheme, but many details were significantly altered.

5. Alterations and additions: In 1926 a guild and vestry room, kitchen and small parish hall were added to the original structure, forming three sides of a quadrangle. The new addition complied with the original plans for this section, submitted by Coxhead in 1914. It was dedicated November 28, 1926, by Bishop Edward L. Parsons. In 1951 an additional section, completing the quadrangle enclosure, was erected. Following the plans laid out by architect Ernest Kump, the section included an extension of the nave, the Rector's office, an anteroom, classrooms, men's and women's lavatories and entry hall. A separate parish hall, designed by Kenneth Elvin, was erected in 1973.

B. Historic Persons and Events Connected with the Structure:

The congregation held its services in Shoup Hall, 300 Main Street, which it rented for a few years until the Orange Street church was erected in 1914. In addition to the building's architectural significance as a Coxhead design, it is also the first church to be built in Los Altos. Due to the growth of the congregation, after the church building was expanded in 1926 and again in 1951, the Episcopalian parish moved in 1962 to a new, larger structure.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

Plan and perspective sketch, Ernest Coxhead, architect, February 1915, The Architect and Engineer of California, p. 93.

Photographs, two general views of the church, July 1918, in The Architect of California.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Junior, Clount, "Historical Sketch of Christ Episcopal Church," manuscript in possession of Christ Episcopal Church, Los Altos.

Santa Clara County Deed Records, Office of the Recorder, Santa Clara County Courthouse, Santa Clara.

b. Secondary and published sources:

"Los Altos News," June 29, 1939.

Woodbridge, Sally, ed. Bay Area Abuses. New York: Oxford
University Press, 1976.

Prepared by: Jan Cigliano
Architectural Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Christ Episcopal Church is a small-scale one-and-a-half story building, constructed with a heavy redwood timber frame and covered with white stucco. The original 1914 church was enlarged in 1926, 1951 and 1973, creating a quadrangle complex, unified by a courtyard at center.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The one-and-a-half story church forms the north wing of the complex and measures approximately 29' (northeast front) x 76', with a porch (5' x 13") on the south side. The east wing, including the breezeway, measures 38' x 16'. The south wing is 108' x 27', and the west wing, including the entrance way, measures 15' x 51', with a porch (5' x 19') extending out from the Rector's office. The four wings enclose a central court.
2. Foundation: Concrete slab.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The original church and wings are constructed of heavy redwood timber. The south wall of the assembly hall is concrete block. Virtually all of the walls, both exterior and interior, are finished with white cement plaster or stucco. The one exception is the fireplace wall which faces the breezeway, which is brown masonite board finished to simulate rough wooden siding.
4. Structural system and framing: The church is constructed with heavy timber; the fireside room and assembly hall are also framed with heavy redwood studs and rafters. The assembly hall's ceiling has

4" x 10" redwood cross-ties, running about 12' high and exposed below the vaulted ceilings. The more recent addition by Ernest Kump has two-by-four stud framing with low, flat interior ceilings. In the parish house, pre-fabricated bents allow for a high ceiling.

5. Porches: A porch on the west side of the courtyard is framed by simple square wooden columns and a flat roof.
6. Chimneys" The main chimney above the fireplace in the fireside room is built of brick and covered with white cement plaster. Several metal pipe chimneys - three on the west wing and two on the south wing - rise above the gable which faces the courtyard.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The south door into the nave of the church is set into a recessed Gothic-arched opening, trimmed with concentric wooden molding, six inches deep. Fronting the doorway is a steep gabled porch with an identically molded pointed arched opening. Heavy wooden double doors, framed in a shallow pointed arch, open into the nave and fireside rooms. The assembly hall's double doors, and most of the other exterior openings, are standard metal fire doors.
 - b. Windows: The large Gothic-arched west window of the church consists of three sections separated by mullions and subdivided by simple cusped tracery finished to simulate carved stone. In the upper third of the center section a wooden cross extends from the tracery up to the point of the arch. The nave side windows have clear glass leaded diamond-shaped quarrels. Some mullioned north windows in the nave are double or triple with tri-lobed cusping below simple segmental arches. The window, now in the west wall of the nave extension was originally behind the altar and moved when the nave and end were extended by Kump in 1951. On the south wall facing the court, and on the north wall opposite the main entrance, are simple rectangular windows.

The typical window in the fireside room and office is a narrow rectangular opening, 18" x 48", with flat wooden surrounds and leaded diamond panes. On the east wall of the fireside room is a bay with a built-in wooden window seat. In the assembly hall a few of the original windows, which open inward, remain. In 1951 Kump installed metal-framed crank windows, some clear and some with a leaded diamond pattern.

8. Roof: Steep gables cover the church and wings. The shingles are identical on all the roof surfaces, exposed six inches to the weather and varying in width from six to ten inches. The shingles on the original 1914 section are in good condition, but are more weathered than those on the more recent wings.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: No basement or crawl space.
- b. First floor: The original church section is approximately fifty-six feet long, nineteen feet wide at the narrowest width, and twenty-six feet wide at the outside wall. The nave extension consists of two bays and adds twenty feet to the length. It is twenty-three feet wide, because the wall thickness has been reduced considerably. The office (11' x 11'), minister's study (11' x 10') and the fireside room (24' x 14') adjoin at the church's east side. The assembly hall (25' x 49') is added as an ell to the office addition; the kitchen hall area (18' x 25') is an extension of the assembly hall.
2. Stairways: The assembly hall stairways leading to the wooden balconies have open wooden treads. The rails are vertical boards, placed on end and spaced closely with a horizontal board which extends across the top, functioning as a handrail.
3. Flooring: The nave, office and minister's study are covered with red carpet over asphalt tile. Dark-stained two-inch redwood boards are in the fireside room. Vinyl asbestos covers the kitchen area, and carpeting is over all remaining floor surfaces.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Virtually all the interior walls and ceilings are white cement plaster with wooden trim. Acoustical tile is on the ceilings of the assembly hall and classrooms.
5. Doorways and doors: The original interior doors in the church office, fireside room and assembly hall are heavy tongue-and-groove wooden paneled doors with glass knobs.
6. Decorative features and trim: All the carved trim and pews in the original section are redwood with a gray infill. Separating the nave from the chancel is a wooden rood screen,

carved in a Gothic cusped arch pattern, with a wooden cross centered at the top. The wooden trim on the ceiling is constructed of thin redwood strips. In the office and fireside rooms, the wooden trim is naturally stained to match the church's infill. Some nave north windows have tri-lobed cusping.

7. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Lighting: The church is lighted by chandeliers of glass cylinders with lead seams. Eight wall lamps of matching glass and lead are evenly spaced on each side. The fireside room and assembly hall have black imitation cast-iron chandeliers and wall lamps. The assembly hall is also lighted by recessed overhead lamps, as are the more recent sections.
- b. Heating: The church, offices, study and fireside rooms are heated by electric space heating; central electrical heating is in the assembly hall wing.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church complex is sited on a half-acre wedge of land, located between Lincoln Avenue and Orange Street and across from Lincoln Park in Los Altos. It stands in the middle of a row of three churches erected on Lincoln Avenue. The parish house, built in the 1970s, is to the west of the church.
2. Historic landscape design: Memorial Court is surrounded on four sides by the church and wings, creating a cloister-like atmosphere.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the County of Santa Clara. The 1978 summer project, the second year of a three-year project in Santa Clara County, was completed under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS; Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect; and Robert Brueggmann, Project Supervisor (University of Illinois, Chicago Circle); with Jack Schafer, Architectural Foreman (University of Cincinnati); and student architects Robert E. Clarke (University of Notre Dame), Barbara M. Friedman (University of Pennsylvania), Julia H. Miner (Yale University), and John B. Murphy (Texas Tech University), at the HABS Field Office in Saratoga,

California. The drawings were edited in the HABS Washington, Office during the summer of 1979 by architect David T. Marsh. The historical and architectural data was researched and written during the summer of 1979 by Jan Cigliano, an architectural historian on the HABS staff, at the 1979 HABS Field Office in Santa Clara, California. Photographs were taken by Jane Lidz in the Summer of 1980.

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